

W r e s t l i n g

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Young Lion Be Not Proud

By - Paul MacArthur

On August 14, a television program generated the expression, "Oh My Lord," from millions of viewers across the country. Unfortunately, it was not the latest *Billy Graham Crusade*. It was *Monday Night Raw* and what caused the aforementioned utterance of disgust from legions of wrestling fans was Dustin Rhodes' first vignette as Goldust. Donning a wig, lipstick, gold makeup and golden jacket, and using an effeminate voice, Rhodes delivered an interview that had nothing to do with pro wrestling. In fact, the embarrassing vignette has little to do with the high expectations fans have for Rhodes. Regrettably, it has everything to do with his future.

When Dustin Rhodes decided to follow in the footsteps of his legendary father, Dusty "The American Dream - Stardust Himself - The Bull Of The Woods" Rhodes, and enter professional wrestling, he knew his challenge would be greater than many of his peers. Dustin would not only have to learn the profession, but he would have to contend with the resentment afforded him because he is Dusty's son. He couldn't merely be good. To be accepted, he had to be great. While other second-generation wrestlers such as Barry Windham, Tully Blanchard, Curt Hennig, and Bret Hart, have had famous fathers in the business, their father's positions gave them immediate acceptance. Dusty's position and lack of popularity among many power players ensured bitterness from Dustin's colleagues at the least and open hostility at the worst. Nonetheless, Dustin entered the world of pro wrestling determined to become a success.

Dustin made his professional debut in the now defunct Florida circuit in 1988, which was run by Gordon Solie and Mike Graham. As a favor to Dusty, who was a wrestler/booker in Jim Crockett's NWA at the time, Solie and Graham allowed Dustin to cut his teeth in their territory. They even let him win his first match. In late 1988, after a few months of seasoning, Dusty decided his son was ready to join the second largest promotion in the United States and brought Dustin in with Kendall Windham. The Young Broncos, as they were called, were quite talented, but they were green and were being pushed too soon. They undoubtedly would have been contenders for the NWA World Tag Team Championship in a matter of months if Dusty had remained in his power position. That never came to pass as Dusty did his famous "spike in the eye" angle with the Road Warriors on national television before *Starrcade '88* and was fired from his booking position by the new owners of World Championship Wrestling: Turner Broadcasting Systems.

When Dusty was fired from his booking position, he chose to leave WCW rather than become one of the boys. He returned to the area where he had the most success and bought into Florida Championship Wrestling. Not surprisingly, he pushed himself as the star of the promotion. While he drew some big houses with Terry Funk - who in one interview even took a chain saw to a cut-out doll of Rhodes - most of the houses were disappointing as it was 1989, not 1979 and the bloom was off the Rhodes.

While Dusty was pursuing Florida, Dustin continued to wrestle for World Championship Wrestling, sans push. He got a few wins here and there, but basically became a jobber to the stars, losing to Butch Reed, Michael Hayes, and other heels who needed credible victories. Clearly WCW management, which at this time included the infamous George Scott booking regime, thought little of Dustin's talents and probably less of his famous father. While Dustin was not ready to be a top star, he showed promise and his talents suggested he deserved better than he received while working for WCW. Then again, the same could be said for any talented wrestler who has walked through WCW's doors over the past seven years.

Eventually Dusty and his accountant decided Florida was a losing venture and after a few months, he bailed out of the Florida promotion. Bigger and better things awaited him in the form of the Common Man. The Common Man: Vince McMahon's way of punishing Dusty for being McMahon's top competitor throughout the Eighties. Dusty made several vignettes which portrayed him as a pizza delivery man, a gas station attendant, a garbage man and who can forget his appearance as a plumber? The spots were embarrassing, but they were nothing compared to the embarrassment of wearing polka dotted tights and being paired with Sapphire. Sapphire, a retired African-American wrestler, who was rather rotund, named Juanita Wright. Yes, it was almost something from *Amos and Andy*. Dusty and Sapphire danced together in the ring, creating a spectacle that leave an indelible mark in the memories of many. Dusty was so ashamed with what he was doing, that when his mother was in the audience at a Texas card, he refused to do the dance with Sapphire.

While the gimmick embarrassed Dusty, as McMahon planned, what surprised McMahon and many hardcore observers, was the positive response Rhodes received from the WWF audience. The Common Man drew fans and made them pop. While he did not supplant Hogan or the Ultimate Warrior as the top draw in the promotion, he became a solid mid-level and occasional main event performer. It should have come as no surprise, for Dusty was a pro and knew how to work a crowd, but most experts thought Dusty's days as a draw were over. They weren't. While he was often booed by the NWA hardcore crowd in the late Eighties, the WWF family crowd loved him. Dusty earned his status as the number three babyface and quickly gained power in the organization he so strongly tried to put out of business years earlier. That power would be exhibited in many ways, including being allowed to blade on a pay-per-view, being put over on house show battle royal when he caused a fit backstage, and eventually the WWF

dropped Sapphire. They also hired his son.

While Dusty paid his dues in the WWF, Dustin paid his dues in the USWA and in Japan. In the USWA, he was given the moderate push a talented rookie deserved. In Japan, he learned some high spots and stiffened up his work. When 1989 came to a close, he was voted rookie of the year in several polls, most notably in the *Wrestling Observer Yearbook*, which came as a surprise if only because of the consistently negative feelings *Observer* readers expressed towards his father. The consensus seemed to be that even though many couldn't stand his father, they felt Dustin was a talented wrestler with tremendous potential and a good work ethic. That reputation, combined with a likable, unpretentious personality served him well in his bid to become a star in a profession where he not only had to fill his father's shoes, but was also held accountable for his father's unpopular actions.

In late 1990, Dusty convinced Vince McMahon to give Dustin a shot in the WWF. A father/son tag team was formed. What many noticed was in that year where he was not under the national microscope, Dustin had improved considerably. Dustin received a moderate push and Dusty continued to be a star. It seemed that the family was happy, as they were both receiving large paychecks and getting national exposure. However, in early 1991, Dusty's career decisions would once again affect his son. While still an employee of the WWF, Dusty began negotiations with WCW. After much speculation, Dusty did a job for Ted DiBiase on the *Royal Rumble* pay-per-view, and within a matter of days was the booker for the company that fired him over two years before.

It didn't take long for Dustin to follow his father to WCW. While WCW strictly forbade Dusty from becoming involved in the ring, they made no such restrictions regarding the employ of his son. Dustin debuted as The Natural and began an undefeated streak that bordered on lunacy.

The announcers pushed Dustin as the purest talent since Jack Brisco. No, Dusty Rhodes. But that made sense since Dustin is a chip off the old block, from the Bull of the Woods very own loins if you will. Hardcores clamored for Dustin's push to be toned down and regardless of his disposition, the fact that the boss' son was being pushed ahead of several other talented veterans caused some resentment. Still, if there was one thing Dustin demonstrated above all, it was that he was tailor made for the profession. He ran with his push and popped crowds throughout WCW's territory. He was a natural.

Dustin would not do a job in WCW until he and Ricky Steamboat were to lose the Tag Team Championship. When Dusty scheduled Steamboat to do the job, Dustin asked his father to let him do it instead. The ever protective father agreed, but never showed Dustin losing the championship on television. However, Dustin's willingness to look at the lights earned him the kind of respect among his peers no amount of in-ring talent could. He became well liked in the locker room and respected in the ring. He even impressed Alexandria York.

During the next two years, Dusty would see his power usurped and resurrected on several occasions. When Bill Watts replaced Kip Frey as director of operations, Dustin's push was toned down considerably while Erik Watts was brought in with a push that made Dustin's push look like Tim Horner's. He did jobs without complaint, but also continued his evolution as a wrestler. His matches with Steve Austin were excellent displays of two young lions oozing with talent competing to be the next top dog in the wrestling world. If it were 1972, it would've been said they were competing to be next in consideration for the NWA title. Instead it was 1992 and good work was rarely noticed. Still, Dustin continued to be a hard worker and it was speculated that it was only a matter of time before he would become World Heavyweight Champion. This would be his future, because of or in spite of his

legendary father. It was, if you will, his destiny.

In 1993, Dusty was finally removed from his booking position in WCW. It wasn't a surprise, as he had far too many hours of television to fill every week and his glory days as one of wrestling's innovative bookers had long since past. WCW retained him as a consultant, but his power within the company was, and is to this day, negligible. Dustin's career, however didn't go into a holding pattern. He continued to receive a moderate push, and the angle that reunited him with his father in the ring ranks as one of WCW's most memorable moments of the Nineties.

This year however, WCW, more concerned than ever about the bottom line, decided it was time to cut back on salaried performers. Dustin fell into that category and WCW simply waited for an opportunity to fire him. After Dustin bladed on a taped match that was aired "live" on pay-per-view, WCW fired him for violating the company policy on blading. As the match was taped in advance, the company could have had him redo it, but a company looking to fire a man only looks for an excuse, not a solution. WCW had their excuse and Dustin had his pink slip. Dusty stayed on.

Enter Goldust. With a shortage of talent, particularly on the heel side in the WWF, Dustin should have made the WWF salivate. He's a talented worker, willing to be a heel. Like his father, has the charisma necessary to get over. The WWF, which is in financial disarray, should take such a prospect and push him to the stars. The WWF was drooling. However, what made them drool was not the opportunity to have Dustin make the company money, but the opportunity to extract revenge on Dusty by humiliating his son.

Dave Meltzer has called Rhodes' gimmick a "career killer." Terry Taylor suggests Goldust is the most embarrassing gimmick since Vince McMahon gave him the Red Roster moniker. Perhaps he has forgotten Papa Shango. Nonetheless, not since

Adrian Adonis has McMahon attempted to push a wrestler with an effeminate gimmick. In the case of Adonis, it was a slow progression, as the former biker slowly started to have a softer edge, eventually started cross dressing, and finally blurted out on *Tuesday Night Titans*, "I'm gay." With Rhodes, the transformation from masculine wrestler to feminine goddess has been instantaneous. Even with a tremendous push, it probably won't be as successful.

What is most puzzling about Goldust is why Dustin agreed to such a scenario. There was much banter behind the scenes, and it would appear that Dustin would not sign a contract unless he agreed on the character. He is talented enough to wrestle anywhere, and has both the look and ability to be the next major American star in All Japan Pro Wrestling. Yet, for some reason, which is totally inexplicable on the surface, Dustin has accepted a gimmick that could kill his career.

It is possible this gimmick could take off. It could make him the modern day Gorgeous George. By the time this scenario runs its course, Goldust could be a household word. With changing values in society and the success of androgynous celebrities, it may be that McMahon is once again ahead of the curve. The fact that it has never worked before, does not mean it will not work now, particularly as society's sexual mores continue to change. Let us also not forget, before *Girllock* magazine had national distribution Adrian Street headlined with a similar gimmick for years, though he never achieved any degree of national success. However, such a gimmick's success depends on McMahon being right and his history of making bizarre gimmicks work is checkered. While many cite the Undertaker, they forget the Double Undertaker. For every Ultimate Warrior, there are several Papa Shangos, Damien Dementos, Bastion Boogers and Outback Jacks.

A wrestler with little ability needs something extra to be successful. In some

cases all he needs is charisma. In other cases it's a gimmick. While some talented wrestlers have used gimmicks to get over in the past, outlandish gimmicks on good wrestlers have a sketchy history. Whether or not the gimmick will work is a roll of the dice. Sometimes that roll can ruin a career. Just ask Terry Taylor.

Now, Dustin Rhodes, who along with the possible exception of Steve Austin, is the most promising young talent this business has to offer is rolling the dice with McMahon. He is taking the respect he has from the fans and his peers and placing it on the table in hopes a transvestite gimmick will make him the most over wrestler in the promotion. Yet, when he has the athletic ability to match up favorably with Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels, the sanity of such a gamble has to be questioned. So does its integrity.

It is always disheartening to see a man with such potential take a tremendous risk with his career when he has the talent to be successful based on his ability and charisma. Dustin has that rare combination, but rather than capitalize on it, McMahon has decided to supplant it with a gimmick that has never worked with great success before. While it is true that with risk comes return, it is also true that with risk comes failure and ruin. Then how will the highly touted career of Dustin Rhodes be viewed?

Many young lions never live up to their expectations. With rare exception, those lions that never reach their potential can look in the mirror and see the reason why. What does Dustin see when he looks in the mirror today as a young lion? What pride will he see when he looks into the mirror 20 years from now? A mind is a terrible thing to waste. So is a future. Goldust may get white hot, but by the end of his WWF stay, the ashes of his career may not even fill the Undertaker's urn. Then, when the lion is no longer the heir apparent to the pride, how will he explain he did it all for a role of the dice when he knew the dealer never had his best interests at heart?

Sidelines

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In Perspective: Les Thatcher

Chances are if you watched wrestling during the Seventies, you either saw or heard Les Thatcher. Thatcher was a headliner and announcer for several regional promotions, particularly in the south. He was worked alongside the best commentators in the business, including Gordon Solie, Lance Russell, Charlie Platt and Jim Ross. In this interview conducted on May 3, 1995 with David Skolnick, Thatcher, who now works for Smoky Mountain Wrestling, discusses his career in the ring and behind the mic. He also gives his opinions on the many personalities he worked with during his long successful wrestling career and what it's like to teach rookies about the business.

Wrestling Perspective: What was your first experience with professional wrestling?

Les Thatcher: I trained with Tony Santos in Boston. As a kid in the late Forties, when it was so hot on TV, my first remembrance

was stopping in a neighbor's house. We didn't have a TV at the time and everyone gathered around the neighbor's TV watching wrestling. I was fascinated by it. My mom and dad both enjoyed it, so we started going to the matches here in the old Music Hall (in Cincinnati) at Parkway Arena. It kind of escalated from there. This, the guys tell me, at the time was one of the biggest promotions in the country. Al Haft out of Columbus. Every major star in the country at one time or another came through here. My idol was Buddy Rogers. At age nine or 10 I wanted to bleach my hair.

WP: Mom put a stop to that?

LT: (laughs) Yes. No Don Eagle haircuts. No bleach. Copied the Rogers' strut, the whole nine yards as a kid. I didn't realize at the time, but when that guy came down the aisle, you knew he was the man. But

it was like you never saw the roots of his hair. Always tan. Just the way he walked. He was a champion before he was a champion.

WP: Did you ever get to meet him?

LT: I've got a picture of he and I as a kid, but I never got to work with the guy in the business or was never in the same place. Ernie Roth lived with Buddy and his wife for about a year when he started in the business. Ernie had a very fertile mind for the business as well. He would say, "I'm going to get you and Rogers together." But it never happened. That's one of the few things I've regretted is I never got a chance to work with him. He was the master.

WP: After Santos trained you, did you start in New England?

LT: Yes, July 4, 1960, in Blue Hills, Maine. Two matches actually. Cowboy

Ronnie Hill in a single and in a tag. His partner was Bull Montana and mine was a local kid from Boston College named Joseph Sasso. It was a spot show. A Fourth of July celebration. It was kind of common then, four wrestler and a referee. You'd work two singles and come back in a tag. That's how it all got started. My partner was in the business for maybe two years at the time. Cowboy Hill and Bull Montana were good workers. Bull Montana was kind of a copy of Bull Curry. A little shorter and wider, but the same features. dark eyebrows, bushy eyebrows.

WP: Did they try to rough up the rookies?

LT: No, we were lucky. I broke in with some good guys and the veterans there at the time were good to work with. I remember talking to Pat O'Connor, he came through at the time when he was champion. He was helpful. Guy Bernetti, Pampero Firpo. I've heard all the horror stories. In fact, I witnessed some (laughs). Some of the educational things. I lived in a rooming house on Weslyn Avenue. I think we paid about \$10, \$12 a week. Last time I was up there, they were half-million dollar condos. In the same apartment house at one time or another was Pat Patterson, Terry Garvin, Luke Graham, Alex Medena, Golden Boy Ronnie Dupree. All good workers. It was a good education.

WP: So did Pat and Terry come on to you?

LT: (laughs) You know, that's the funniest thing. When I read about that, I wonder how much of that, I'm not saying that it didn't happen, but I remember when we were kids, Pat and Terry both, but Pat sometimes more than Terry, if he felt you were uncomfortable with who he was, he would aggravate you with it. He would see how uncomfortable you would get. I'm just wondering with these kids...

WP: If he was just ribbing them?

LT: Yeah, yeah. They just blew it out of proportion. I don't know, but there were some characters.

WP: That was kept in the closet in the Sixties.

LT: Yeah, I was a naive young man from the Midwest, 19 year old. It was an education (laughs). In terms of the business, I train guys here in a wrestling school and I tell them back then you got to work even if it was part time. That's the way you learned and now it's so hard for these guys to work once or twice a month. It's really tough.

WP: For example, your trainees worked a couple of months ago and got an education (when NuJack shooted on some at a show that was supposed to be a Smoky Mountain Card. Instead, the card was filled with Thatcher's students when SMW canceled).

LT: (laughs) Hello.

WP: What happened there?

LT: Well, believe me, I was in a state of shock. I wasn't even aware what was going on, while that was transpiring. Al Snow and I were coming out Tennessee on our way home and I found out it happened when I got home. We went round and round about that. They're all good guys and they're trying to learn, but they were out of place there. It's over and done with. The situation never should have happened. It was a bad series of mistakes on the part of a lot of people.

WP: Do you feel protective of those guys?

LT: I do.

WP: It's not a real common occurrence for someone to come in and start shooting.

LT: I think what happened there is, from the best I can gather and I haven't talked to him yet, it that he was drinking and it got out of hand. The kids look up to the guy and they think whatever he says is law. That's one thing I've told them. You respect the business and they guys in it. They were shocked by the whole thing. They were like, "Wow." It was a bad situation and should never have happened. Actually, those guys shouldn't have been there. It's like being a Monday morning quarterback. I sit here and tell you how I would have done it, but it's not going to rectify the situation. But most of these guys realize they were in over their heads. Quite a few

of them are ready for spot shows, but to go in sending a substitute, common sense says you make that substitute look like a million bucks. When you substitute a whole card of seasoned veterans for the most part with rank amateurs, rookies at the very best, there's just no way. It just doesn't happen. They learned. Not the way I would have preferred.

WP: Did anyone quit?

LT: Yeah, I had a couple of guys get a bad taste in their mouth. One of the guys said, "It was the seedy side of the business." I said, "July the Fourth of this year will be 35 years for me and it's been pretty much a love-hate relationship the entire time (laughs). So you let that get the best of you." I think he'll come back. It created a little problem from within, but I think everything will be A-OK.

WP: From New England, you went where?

LT: I came back here. At the time it was Barnett Doyle out of Indianapolis and Detroit. We're just 100 miles from Indy. How I got my foot in the door there was Emile Duprey was a friend of Les Ruffin in that office and Emile told me to use his name. I wrote a letter and sent a picture and he called me. So I got my first big shot. I worked with Angelo Poffo, Randy's dad. I used to buy tickets to watch him, so I was totally awed. I got in with some good veterans who if you could work and they saw that, you were willing to put the time into it, they were willing to help you. The Sheik, the Bruiser, Art Nelson, a good crew of guys. At that time, there was good crew of guys everyone.

WP: You were doing opening, mid-card?

LT: Opening for the most part and then here in Cincinnati they'd put me mid-card. Back then, Jack Brisco and I talked about this a long, long time ago, it was like, "Hey kid, you're a good worker. Too bad you don't look older." It was like you don't use young guys. You had to be veteran and look grizzled. So it didn't matter. You got complimented on your talent.

WP: But you had to get old.

LT: Yeah, exactly. But it was a different thing too because you were taught to work for the respect of your peers as well. It wasn't just a buck or a business. It wasn't just to get yourself over. Those accolades were as important as getting the crowd on their feet. It was a real good learning experience. I was real lucky to fall in with so many good workers at the time. I worked in and out of here. Obviously being at home... I've been in drag racing since I was 15 years old. I drove on the drag strip before I drove on the street. I worked out of here in '62 and went to Calgary for the summer. The first summer that Stu (Hart) ran. They always ran seasonal, but in the winter. They needed some guys up there and I went up there and went three months.

WP: What'd you think of Stu?

LT: (laughs) He's a piece of work. I just met Bret for the first time this past summer. He was like five years old at the time. That was beautiful country. I met Killer Kowalski for the first time. I got to work with Mark Lewin, Ronnie Etchinson. I met Primo Carnera. That was a highlight. He was quite a character. They kept an eye on him like he was a child. Where's Primo? He'd wander off with some Italian family and go eat and they wouldn't know where to find him.

WP: It was a real big deal.

LT: Yeah, I remember one time Jessie Ortega was kind of the bodyguard for Primo. Make sure he didn't get too far from homebase. He was a nice guy. It was a good summer. Came back through here for a while.

WP: Making a living in the business?

LT: Yes and no. Back then, the pay structure was a little different. I was making ends meet, but nothing real great. I went to Kansas City in '63 for (Bob) Geigel and O'Connor. In fact, O'Connor was just moving in. That was where the Stomper gimmick got started, the Mongolian Stomper. He still works somewhat around Knoxville. Enrique Torrez was there. I

learned a lot about timing from Enrique. He had a bad back. At that time, he must of been in his late 40s, early 50s. He couldn't move, but he still had tremendous matches because he had great psychology. As a kid, all these guys had wrestled through here. It was like, "Show me an arena." It was a thrill. When it started to take off and the money was good was about '66. I was out in Phoenix for a while with Ernie Mohammed, which was an experience. This guy was a contractor who started a wrestling promotion. Beautiful Bob Harmon, who's from here, we both went out there. Gorgeous George Jr. was there. The Original Assassins.

WP: When Jody could fit in his mask.

LT: (laughs) In fact it might of been a couple sizes small. I spent a few months out there. The trip was nice, but it wasn't the greatest business experience. I then went into Georgia, into Atlanta for the first time for Paul Jones and Buddy Fuller. The booker was Leo Garabaldi and that is one of my mentors. To me, he could step in now and book, pick it up right where he left off and turn this thing around. They guy had a fertile mind. He was one of the sharpest guys I ever worked around. Let me back up a bit. In '63, I went to Charlotte for three months. That was a territory that if you didn't have a rep, you had to have a reference. So Sandy Scott, who I had met here working for Barnett Doyle and Johnny Heideman opened that door for me. A lot of good talent there. A lot of tag teaming. That was my first venture into the southeast. Then Atlanta in '66 when I teamed up with Roger Kirby and Dennis Hall. We went down to the Gulf Coast and had a good run down there with Donnie Fargo, Jack Dalton and Frank Dalton and Bull Ramos. We did a lot of six-mans. Then came into Mobile for Lee Fields. We had the lower part of Louisiana. We were based out of Baton Rouge and we went over to Mobile-Pensacola back in the spring and that's when I first met Eddie Graham and Lester Welch. They had a tag tournament, so they invited me to Tampa, which thrilled me to no end because at that time everybody wanted to get into Tampa. I never even

thought about trying. Stories get blown out of proportion.

WP: How was Graham?

LT: Nice, good man. Working for him was a good education. But getting asked to come in... I heard to work there you had to be a shooter. You had to be a great amateur and I was neither. I went down there and they gave me a little push. NWA rookie of the year.

WP: After six years in the business.

LT: (laughs) Yeah, overnight sensation. That's where I met our mutual goofy friend Terry (Funk) and enjoyed his company immensely ever since.

WP: He was just starting then.

LT: That was his first time he'd flown the coup. That was the first time Senior let him out. He came into Tampa a good worker. Wahoo was there at the time. The Monroe brothers, Jose Lothario, Malenko, Tarzen Tyler, Kirby came in as my partner later. Ronnie Garvin was there. Matsuda, Don Curtis, great worker. The originator of the Frankenstein. He did that flying headscissors back then. There you go. There was a shooter who was a flyer too. That was a great crew of boys. We were there in '67 and Kirby and I came into the Carolinas again and Dennis was there.

WP: How did you work that with two partners?

LT: Well, you know the funny thing is we had talked to George Becker. Becker was the booker in Charlotte at the time. We didn't have any name to call ourselves. We tried to rotate like the Freebirds did later, but nobody would buy it then. We just had some idea we thought we could work. But nobody wanted to take the chance. As you know in the business, we get into fads two years after the fads die out (laughs). A good break there was, for whatever reason, they decided to team Roger and Dennis up, so I wasn't with anyone in particular. I worked with Rudy Kay, who promoted the Maritime provinces for a while in the early Seventies and into the Eighties. He and I were partners some. What actually

happened was I got involved with Becker and Weaver, who were the top babyface team, and they worked six-mans. At that time in the territory, there were managers, so this was a never-ending cycle. I worked a lot of six-mans and made a real good living. That was a good place to learn about tag teams. They usually had a four-match card. They had two tags and after the tag was the main event. Then in '68, I went to Nashville for Gulas and Welch. That was an education. The funny thing is Hall and another good friend of mine, Kenny Lucas, were in there. They said, "You know, this guy's not too bad." Well, it could have been a lot better. I stayed there a while.

WP: What did you think of Gulas?

LT: He was a piece of work. Gosh, if you were making a movie, that's the colorful type promoter you'd want. He was a trip. He was always trying to con you into something (laughs). Always trying to talk you into doing something. Nick started everybody. "Yeah, I started that boy. I knew him before he had that name. I invented tag team matches." He was a character. That's where Len Rossi and Jackie Fargo were.

WP: That's where you really came into your own.

LT: Yeah, in the Carolinas and through there. I saw Jerry Jarrett evolved there. I remember Jerry Lawler when he was doing a radio show in college. How he used to gain access to the old Memphis Auditorium was a gentleman by the name of Coffey who was the building manager and Jerry used to do caricatures, for Mr. Coffey to hang up in his office of the wrestlers or the big stars who played the place. In return, he got to come into the show. That's how I first met Jerry Lawler. In fact, Bobby Heenan in '62, '63, was carrying jackets in Indianapolis. I believe he was working in a Ford garage. He couldn't have been very old. I was 22, 23. I imagine he was 19, 20. He's a character too.

Talking about the Maritimes, I went up there for the season. They ran a summer season, six months, in '70. That's

where I got my first taste of being a television commentator. That was quite a story. Rudy Kay, the promoter up there, he and I were tag team partners in the Carolinas. We traveled a lot together. Of course you talk about anything and everything to kill time on the road. I had done some dragster work up in Cincinnati. One of the things that I had done was worked as the P. A. announcer and call the races. I had always had aspirations of being a Wolfman Jack when I was a kid. So we were doing TV in Halifax and Randy called me on Monday evening and he just started talking. "Are things going okay for you here? By the way, George Cannon, - Crybaby Cannon, who had been doing the TV - had a death in the family in Toronto and there's no one to do the TV Wednesday morning in Halifax. So tomorrow, when we go to Halifax, bring a suit." I said, "Why?" He said, "You're going to do the TV." I said, "Are you nuts?" "Well," he said, "I remember when we made the trips, you said you'd like to do that. So I thought you could do it." Right, man. I said, "Okay." I didn't know what else to say so I went into the studio on Wednesday morning. I'd done interviews, but I had never done color. I had no co-host. Honest to God, they turned the microphone on and 60 minutes worth of tape rolled. Miracle of miracles, we got through it. That was my baptism into commentary. I had never done it before in my life. For some reason, it came off all right, so I did two or three weeks and then Cannon, for some reason he went up and he had to stay. So Rudy said, "You're doing a good job. By the time George would come back, the season would be almost over. I think I'll let him stay out for the season and you finish up." So I went ahead and finished as play-by-play/color commentator and everything else for the summer. I left there and went back to Nashville briefly. The season closed there in mid-October in '70. Then I went into Tampa again. Down there at the time was Jack Brisco, Bob Roop, Kenny Mantell, he was Kenny Hudson down there, Wahoo was in there still. Ron Fuller was just getting his start. Garvin was there. Louis Tillet, Sammy Steamboat, Danny Miller.

The Crockett territory was looking for some change. I was working the middle of the card in Tampa because the top spots were pretty much filled up and they called me and said, "Crockett knows you're down there and he's looking for a new babyface team. We thought you and Danny Miller, since you're both from Ohio would like to go up." Jim Crockett Sr. was one of the real class acts in the business I thought. I didn't even hesitate. Danny and I came north into Charlotte in the spring of '71 and they started giving us a push as a team. Danny left after a while. I stayed on and worked with some different people. Scott Casey came in. He was just getting started. I worked with him. Jim Dillion. J.J. he pulled my coat tail. A mutual acquaintance told me J.J. was coming to the Carolinas. The first time he was on the road. He started as a referee and they told him, "Les Thatcher is there. He's a friend. Tell him to show you around." So anyway, J.J. and I got to be friends. We were partners for a while.

WP: Was he a good wrestler?

LT: Yes, yes he was. Skinny as a rail then. You wouldn't know that now (laughs). But, yeah, he was a real good worker. He had a good mind for the business. He was a school teacher. English, I believe. He was always very analytical. Jim's good. We had a good run in there. The good thing about the Carolinas is this is a big territory. They could always recycle you. You could stay in there. I wasn't doing TV at first and Lord Littlebrook came in to work and he had been up in Canada and mentioned to Crockett Sr., "Hey, governor, why isn't this guy doing your TV?" "What do you mean?" Jim said, "Somebody else told me you were doing that up there. Would you be interested in trying?" I said, "Sure." I started sitting in and doing color with Big Bill Ward in Charlotte on the Charlotte show. That evolved into working some in Raleigh. We were doing three TVs at the time. One in Winston-Salem, two shows in Raleigh on Wednesday nights and then the Charlotte show. So I was jumping around doing whatever they needed. Then there was the big war of Atlanta in '73. Gunkel

and the NWA. Jack Brisco and Timmy Woods and a couple of other guys had bought in down there and they called asked me to come down and help in the office and help with the TV and what have you. So I went down there. Gordon and I got to be friends in '67 in Tampa. But I got to work with him on the air in Atlanta in '73. He was the first guy I ever stopped to take notice of as a commentator that I thought actually gave the business credibility. If you remember back, the national guys like Dennis James and Guy LeBow. Then the regional guys were usually a staff announcer that they'd pick up and give the guy 25 bucks and he'd come in and act like a clown and get some exposure for himself and make fun of the wrestlers. They didn't know a thing about sports, usually didn't want to. Who paid attention to them? They seemed to be the same every place you went. But when I saw Gordon in '67, I said, "Aww, man, this guy's got it down." As a matter of fact, both Ross and I say he's our mentor.

WP: He's the best. Even now, though he's not the same.

LT: I think a part of that is you hear yourself talking. You say, "My God, I've said this a million times." Then you're almost hesitant to say it again. But realize that there's probably 10 million people who never heard you say it. I read in one of the sheets in the past year and a half that when Heenan first went to WCW that obviously Heenan was over Gordon's head because Gordon wasn't reacting to Heenan. I said, "Obviously, this person doesn't know." Gordon didn't react because Gordon doesn't react. He's not one-half of a song and dance team. He's doing what he's supposed to do.

WP: The show he did with Dusty and Larry Zbyszko was so refreshing. They were the only announcing team that actually talk about the match going on in the ring. They didn't spend all of their time plugging the 900 number or the next pay-per-view.

LT: Or themselves.

WP: They did plug, but to a much lesser

extent. They'd talk about the match, which for that promotion is so refreshing.

LT: Isn't that amazing? It's a new concept. Let's talk about what's going on in the ring. Works for me. Honestly, I've been around 36 years. I know things change. I helped changed some of the TV concepts in the Seventies in Knoxville. Still, you can't get away from the basic premise of this business. If you do, I don't care how unique and new it is, you're going to lose some people. The main jist of this thing is still professional wrestling. Going back to the guys I teach here, "Boys, the basics are still the basics. Here's an old tape of Pat O'Connor and Buddy Rogers, Comiskey Park. Now you're not going to see any moonsaults or power bombs."

WP: You're lucky if you see a headscissor.

LT: Right, but when they do it, it's the right time. The moves mean something. Now, you bring it forward to 1995. What are you going to do in between the power bombs and the moonsaults? Exactly what Rogers and O'Connor did in '61. I think your commentators should be the same way. We try to direct your eyes to what's going on. We establish credibility with ourselves. That's where a lot of guys blow it and then we're able to establish credibility with the wrestlers. I think we can't b.s. the people. When somebody says, "The whole arena's on their feet," and you see one person getting up to go to the bathroom and everybody else is half-asleep, you're blowing your own credibility. This is television, boys. One time back in the Seventies, Tiger Conway Sr. and Steve Keirn were against the Andersons. They were pushing Conway and Keirn on the Raleigh show. I made a reference to them as a young team lacking in experience coming on with youth and vigor. There they are pressing the Andersons for an advantage. I came off the air and somebody said, "Hey, you shouldn't do that." I said, "What?" "You called Keirn and Conway young." "They are young. I don't have to tell people. This is television." It was one of the old guys trying to sell that concept again. Don't tell anybody they're young. Again, if I blow my credibility, then I can't

establish anyone else's. That's Gordon's key. There's no doubt who Gordon is. I had a chance to work with Ross for several months. Easy man to work with. He comes prepared to work. I've worked with Gordon, Ross, Bob Caudle, Lance Russell, Ed Capral, Charlie Platt, every top guy in the business. I met Tony Schiavone. I don't know him, but I met him once. I'd like to try working with Schiavone. I think you have to establish yourself.

WP: Talking about credibility. Schiavone was fabulous four, five years ago. I though he was very refreshing. Now it's difficult at times to watch him because he's lost so much.

LT: The problem there is the product has lost credibility. I think if you know the difference, it's hard. If you have any respect for what you're doing, it's hard. Again, I totally believe in change. The basics are still the basics.

WP: It's hard to get excited about the Butcher or Jim Duggan when five years ago you were watching Flair, Windham, Blanchard and Anderson.

LT: Exactly. It's like some of the guys from here that I train went to Knoxville for Sunday Bloody Sunday II. They rented a van and made a weekend of it. They had only seen WWF, WCW on TV. The thing that impressed them the most in Knoxville was the reaction the guys got from the little moves. "That guy got a wrist lock and he threatened him and the crowd popped." "What's your point?" "We've never seen them do that." "It's called working guys. It's not a new concept."

WP: You find so few places that pop for that. Everyone else has seen it all.

LT: I was reading in your anniversary issue (issue #50) of *Perspective*. You mentioned your conversation with Buddy Rogers. I was smiling to myself when I read it because not even knowing the man, I can imagine him laying out scenarios. Still, probably his basics are as solid as they get to be today. I think subtleties make the difference. I don't see wrestlers in there anymore. Too much bells and whistles and

the whole nine yards. It's like when Backlund came back on the scene, somebody said, "Who's that generic wrestler?" He was. He stood out because he didn't paint his face or have music or an entourage. If I have learned anything about our business, it's that we over-do everything. We have to pull back and I see that happening in the WWF now. They're

coming back to more basics. If you sit down and analyze Rosanne or Cosby or one of my favorite stand-ups, Whoopie Goldberg, as funny as all three are, they all have one thing in common: they weave some though provoking thing into their story. They pull you down enough to say, "Wow, she's funny, she's made a point." We're forgetting to do that.

Don't miss our next issue which will feature part two of our in-depth discussion with Les Thatcher. In part two, Les discusses working with Bill Watts, Leo Garabaldi, Bobby Shane, Bob Armstrong and many other greats. Plus, he also provides his excellent insight on the business today. This interview is must-read and a worthy addition to your wrestling library. If your subscription expires with this issue, renew today.

Our Departure From The Real Wrestling Hotline

In August of last year, Steve Beverly helped secure *Wrestling Perspective* a slot on the Real Wrestling Hotline. At the time, we viewed this opportunity as a double-edged sword. The hotline scene is a different level of media reality from traditional print journalism, newsletters, and even on-line wrestling coverage. Frankly, we were uncertain whether our type of analysis would translate to this new venue. Nonetheless, it was an opportunity to supplement our *Wrestling Perspective* revenues and we felt it was worth exploring. However, after we received our June payment, it was obvious our work on the Hotline would, at the very least, require significant retooling if we were to continue to put our energies into that venture.

On July 13, we filed the last WP installment on the Real Wrestling Hotline, which has been rechristened the Wrestling Observer Hotline. At that time, we were unaware that was our last installment, as there had not been any formal communication between the Wrestling Observer Hotline and *Wrestling Perspective*. In the July 17 edition of the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, mailed July 12, Dave Meltzer announced that he was now co-owner of the Hotline (the other co-owner being Steve Beverly) and that it had been given the Observer handle. A new schedule for the Wrestling Observer Hotline was printed with no spot allocated to *Wrestling*

Perspective. That was the first we heard about the decision to remove *Wrestling Perspective* from the Wrestling Observer Hotline. In fact, our July 13 report erased a report that had been filed earlier by another Hotline personality. Apparently, the July 6 report was to be our last, but we were never informed of that fact. To add further confusion to this situation, the July issue of *Matwatch*, mailed July 5, listed *Wrestling Perspective* on the Hotline schedule.

This isn't a financial issue. It's a question of professionalism and class. Dave Meltzer and Steve Beverly have been trusted friends and associates of ours for more than five years, yet they never called or wrote to inform us of any change in our status on the Hotline. David Skolnick left a message for Dave Meltzer on July 15, which was not returned. On July 19, Paul MacArthur called Dave Meltzer and discussed the situation. Dave Meltzer said the reason for the lack of communication was he was waiting for Steve Beverly to give him Paul's phone number, since both Paul and Dave had moved in the past year and Steve had Paul's home and work phone numbers. Apparently Steve never gave Dave Meltzer a phone number for Paul, and Dave Meltzer implemented the changes without ever communicating with *Wrestling Perspective*. Paul left a message on Steve's answering machine on July 19, but as of

press time (August 28) has yet to have his call returned.

This situation leaves us feeling mostly... sad. Respect is something that can not be quantified; it can only be earned or lost through merit. In the professional world, you treat longtime friends and associates with respect; you don't make them read that they've been replaced in a newsletter. You call them, talk to them, and you come to an understanding. If, for some reason, you do not have their phone number, you send them a letter and ask them to call you and discuss the situation.

In the half decade plus that we've published *Wrestling Perspective*, we have always attempted to avoid personal issues and ugly quarrels, and we have no intention of changing that policy. We simply felt that some sort of explanation was due to the people who have supported *Wrestling Perspective*, in whatever format. We will continue to explore alternative media as a means of supplementing this publication which we produce largely because we enjoy doing so. We have enjoyed operating on a professional and courteous level with the entire wrestling community, and will continue to do so. We've just lost a little innocence and a little of the joy that had been part and parcel of the *Wrestling Perspective* dynamic.

THE PHANTOM OF THE RING

Magazine Daze - Part Two

With *Wrestling Eye's* success came inevitable criticism. In this case it was from wrestlers and promoters (expected) and newsletter editors (disappointing, but also expected). Of the two groups, the wrestlers and promoters were more honest. They were concerned we would expose the business, and thus ruin their livelihood. Because of our attitude, we were persona non grata at many arenas. We told our photographers and writers never to mention us to anyone, lest they, too, wind up barred. There was one case where we were supposed to cover the NWA card at the New Jersey Meadowlands. Mike Bellew asked me to go because he couldn't get off work that night. He then made the mistake of telling Gary Juster who was coming. Juster asked him to reconsider. Seems I had printed the real names of the Road Warriors in my Phantom column and they wanted nothing more than to make me into a human wishbone. Even Mike became concerned, telling me maybe it would be best if I skipped the whole thing. I declined, answering that I lined up a friend from work to act as photographer. If the Road Warriors did the expected and worked me over, my friend would snap the photos and run for the hills. Later we could sell them to the New York tabloids and, if need be, use them as the basis of a lawsuit. But Juster called back the afternoon of the show and told Mike the passes were rescinded. Too dangerous, and Dusty Rhodes didn't want me anywhere near the arena. So much for that.

Dusty also phoned us on one occasion to blast Mike for a story he had written about Sam Houston and Baby Doll being husband and wife. Seems that Dusty was attempting to develop the Kansas City area as a sort of farm promotion and was pushing a feud between up-and-coming babyface Houston

and the despicable led by Baby Doll. We had blown the whistle on the whole angle, much to Dusty's anguish. Even I had to agree with the Dustman on that occasion. I encouraged Mike to publish the article, but I forgot about the timing. There is a difference between printing the facts and going out of one's way to antagonize someone. It was a good lesson in fact, for I had unwittingly crossed that line.

About this time we were trying to establish a rapport with Mid-South Promotions, albeit in our usual half-hearted pathetic manner. We would feature Mid-South wrestlers in articles in return for promoter cooperation (photos, passes for our photographers and writers, etc.). However, Jim Ross, who was the Head Muckety-muck or something like that at the time, wanted final approval over the articles while promising nothing in return. Try as we might, we just weren't about to kiss his fat derrière. Exit Mid-South. As for the WWF, we didn't even try to establish a relationship. They were banning every magazine at the time. We appreciated their stand and saved our venom for articles about them.

Our most dangerous critic, however, was closer to home and came in the form of one John Ort. Our employer also published a boxing magazine and John was its editor. He had been in the writing business for a long time, having written for *Ring Wrestling* back in the Sixties. He fancied himself on good terms with Vince McMahon and naturally thought what we were doing was blasphemy. He would tell Mike that this was not the way to do things. You'll get people mad at you; no one will give you a story; you just don't do things this way, etc. Often I would have to go and undo the damage Ort had done on Mike's ego. Ort could get to Mike because he was the one

person Mike feared turning into. Mike saw John as a hack who was scratching out a hard scrabble life writing two-bit stories for a two-bit publication for two-bits. Mike had bigger aspirations than that. Now, if this wasn't bad enough, I had to deal with newsletter editors. I had made the mistake of printing my home phone number in the fan club column (this is the work of a professional idiot; never attempt this yourself) and wrestling people would call. The calls went something to the tune of "oh, my plug was just fine. . . sales are up, thank you. . . but your approach to the sport is disrespectful. . . an honest magazine would only hurt the business." Hurts their business is what they really meant. I must admit that I met many fine people and made many friends over the years that I spoke with editors and writers. I enjoyed helping them in the publication, and I even helped Dave Meltzer boost his circulation by giving him our subscription list. But there were some editors who simply seemed to have the attitude of "today, this newsletter; tomorrow, the Pulitzer." The best way to handle these people was to pull the plug - literally. I did my share of that over the years.

Reaching Higher, and Then. . .

We added to our staff in the person of Mike O'Hara, who along with Mike Bellew wrote an article on wrestling terminology. It contained very inside stuff, and judging from the mail bag, was one of the most popular pieces we did. We received more criticism about that article than any other. Not from the fans, mind you, or even the promoters, who long ago decided to ignore us, but rather from the sheets. If we learned anything from this, it was that the sheet writers saw themselves as a sort of priesthood, guarding the "houses of the

holy." To bare the treasured secrets of wrestling to the dreaded marks was the highest sort of blasphemy. At first glance, it seemed that we were hitting our peak. But in actuality it was the beginning of the end. The first crack in the facade occurred when Gene Gordon passed away. As usual, Mike didn't understand the ramifications, simply telling me of Gene's death over the phone and remarking offhandedly, "Well, I guess old Gene's in hillbilly heaven." But without Gordon, the photos began to dry up. Not every photographer was willing to submit work and wait forever for payment - if at all. Mike took a sort of sadistic pleasure in cheating these people out of what little money they were asking. But he failed to realize that those gyped were not sending in new material and the pool of willing photogs was quickly drying up.

The second sign made itself evident when Tom Burke cut back his contributions. Tom had the patience of a saint, but even saints get fed up. While comparing notes one evening we discovered that Mike would complain about Tom to me ("Tom only writes about dead wrestlers. Who the hell cares about dead wrestlers? I need stories and photos about living wrestlers.") and complain about me to Tom ("The Phantom's a real idiot. He thinks his approach will sell. It only pisses off the promoters. They don't want anything to do with him. How can I sell the magazine with him on the staff?") When Mike finally realized that Tom was cutting back his contribution, he tried to get me to pull Tom's plugs from the fan club column. (When you're not paying someone, you have to do what you can.) When I threatened to quit, Mike quickly rescinded the order. He couldn't run a magazine by himself.

The third sign was a constantly recurring one: Mike had lost all sense of direction with the magazine. The most evident example of this concerned a feature article I did on Debbie Combs. Tom Burke had called me to ask if I'd like to interview Debbie. It took me one nanosecond to say yes. He would set it up for me, admitting the reason he didn't do it himself was

because of his feud with Mike. If anyone was a natural for a wrestling magazine, it was Combs. Besides being one of the most beautiful women ever to set foot inside the ring, she was also one of the most intelligent people in the business. Interviewing her was a breeze. I mentioned that I wanted to put her on the cover, so she sent me a very sexy picture of herself in a blue skin-tight wrestling suit. We couldn't miss with her on the cover, I thought. Ooops, I forgot about Mike. "Who's going to buy her on the cover? Women don't sell magazines," he said. "No," I said, "then how about the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit editions?" This caused Mike to shift gears, but only for a moment. "You think this could sell?" he asked. "No doubt about it," I replied. "I'll think about it." That was that, or so I thought. He then asked me if Combs was a good friend of Tom. I said yes, and she was also a good friend of mine. I should have kept my mouth shut, because when the issue came out Debbie's photo was nowhere to be seen, either on the cover or inside the magazine. Another chance blown by Mike's tremendous business acumen.

Yet, the magazine continued to sell well enough for the publishers to launch a sort of "sister" publication. Called *Wrestling Fury*, it would be published every other month, alternating with the *Eye*. When asked if I wanted to contribute to the *Fury*, I declined. It was enough to write for one publication without being paid, never mind two. He didn't need me anyway; the magazine sold as well as the *Eye* and this in turn spurred Mike on to new levels. He figured that he wasn't getting enough from the publishers for his efforts, not that his overhead was killing him. So he got into contact with another publisher about putting out a new magazine. Naturally, he asked if I would help. I said I would help in getting the thing started and actually recruited Dave Meltzer to write a column. Dave sent me an excellent piece of writing which I forwarded to Mike along with a few pieces of my own. It would be a nice shock to see how it came out. Well, we were shocked. When the magazine came out I had to buy my copy off the stands. Mike said he wasn't

given any extras to hand out (I should have smelled a rat right then and there). When I looked inside was appalled by what I saw. My pieces were so rewritten as to be barely recognizable. Dave's article wound up butchered under a pseudonym. The thing that completely threw me was that there was no rhyme or reason to what Mike was doing. The easiest thing to do was to let the pieces run as they were written. Why make extra work for yourself? The second and final shock of my tenure was when the next issue of the *Eye* came out and I found that Mike had completely rewritten my piece on John Studd. Instead of a look at Studd's career, the article now seemed to be a copy (and a bad one at that) of a Weston magazine. I called Mike to quit. He said it didn't matter because he would continue to write future articles under my name. I told him that he could discuss that with my lawyer and hung up. It would be the last time I would speak with Mike.

A month later Mike O'Hara called to inform me that Mike Bellew had passed away. It was December 21, his birthday, and he was driving home after celebrating a bit too much when he lost control of his car and slammed into a tree. I was numb that entire Christmas. As much as I fought with Mike, there was a certain camaraderie. You don't work as close as we did as long as we did and not get that feeling. The publishers called me. They had someone to take over the *Eye*, did I want to edit the *Fury*? I declined. I was too tired from all the fighting and the money wasn't really compensation for the time, as I had a full-time job. I recommended Barbi Barker as the editor and they hired her. Barbi would often talk to me about editing a wrestling magazine. Her complaint was that no one would give her the chance because she was a woman. Well, now she had her chance, and to tell the truth, she didn't do too bad, considering what the magazine was. Carmine DeSpirito took over as editor of the *Eye*. I wrote a few pieces to get him started and began to think to myself that perhaps I was getting a second wind. But all that went out the window when I saw what Carmine was doing with the magazine. He was using it to

promote himself and his friends. In his first (and my last) issue he staged an attack on himself by David Schultz, replete with photos. I remember the exact same thing was done with Abdullah the Butcher by *Wrestling Revue* in the late Sixties. It looked lousy then. It looked even more amateurish now. I informed Carmine that I was leaving the magazine, and as we never really hit it off. I think he was glad to see me go.

Retrospective

Did I do the right thing? I think so. There are certain times when one knows one has reached the proverbial end of the line. I fought for an honest magazine, free of the usual baggage that accompanies enterprises of this sort. When I saw that I could not achieve this goal I left, older and wiser for the experience. But it was not all for naught, for it was during my days at the magazine that I was able to develop the writing style and persona which you, the subscriber, read today. Looking back, was it fun? Well, yes and no. Did it pay? Definitely not. So why did I do it, then? Strange as this may seem, in the first place I was asked and asked at the right time. Also, setting aside the pecuniary shortfall (not really much of a factor since I already had a full-time job), I saw this as an opportunity to use journalistic skills that were wasting away at my former job. I have always felt that, despite the extreme ups and downs the job had, it did prepare me by teaching me how to write. Journalism class is one thing, reality is quite another. The other benefit I derived from this experience was also of immense value. Writing for a wrestling magazine put me close to the action of wrestling itself, and thus permanently cured me of any desires I might have had about getting into wrestling. Every serious fan I've known has always in some way wished to enter the world of wrestling. Become "one of the boys," so to speak. I was no different, but the experience of working for this magazine cured me forever of that fever. Finally, would I do it again? If the offer was right and I was assured of control, definitely yes. I don't believe a wrestling magazine could do well today. The *Eye* and the *Fury* have folded, as well as their rival publication *Main Event*. The time is not ripe for a wrestling magazine, and may never become ripe. But if there's one thing I've learned in all the years of following wrestling, never count anything out.

Next Issue:

- **Part Two Of The Les Thatcher Interview**
- **The Phantom Looks At Clarence Eklund**
- **Analysis, Commentary & More...**

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